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IX.—LESSING AND SHAKESPEARE.

THE object of this paper is to show that Lessing's knowledge of Shakespeare and his influence in introducing and popularizing the great English poet in Germany have been generally overestimated. To forestall any preconceived opinions it may be stated that the position advocated has not been suggested by such works as Franz Mehring's *Die Lessing-Legende* or Paul Albrecht's *Lessings Plagiate*, in which the sole purpose of the authors seems to be to pluck the laurel wreath from the head of one whom Herder regarded as the greatest critic of Germany and Macaulay as the first of Europe.

This overestimation is especially noticeable in English criticism, for which Coleridge is undoubtedly largely responsible. In his *Biographia Literaria* (Chap. XXIII), the following tribute is paid our German poet: "It was Lessing who first introduced the name and the works of Shakespeare to the admiration of the Germans; and I should not, perhaps, go too far, if I add that it was Lessing who first proved to all thinking men, even to Shakespeare's own countrymen, the true nature of his apparent irregularities." A somewhat more moderate statement is found in Lowell's essay on Lessing. The great Shakespearian editor, Mr. Furness, refers to Lessing in his preface to the *Tempest* as "Germany's greatest and truest Shakespearian scholar," and in his preface to *Hamlet* he calls him "the Englishman born in Germany who was the first, more than a hundred years ago, to announce to his countrymen the advent of Shakespeare." Prof. Lounsbury in his recent book, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist* (p. 74), alludes to Lessing as the man "who first proclaimed Shakespeare as the true modern inheritor of Greek Art."

That this estimate of Lessing's relations to Shakespeare is universal among English critics is not surprising. The same prevails among German critics who have served as their authorities. A. W. von Schlegel referring to Lessing said: "Er sprach zuerst mit Nachdruck von Shakespeare, und bereitete dessen Erscheinung vor" (*Werke*, VI, p. 407). Heinrich Heine in his essay on *Shakespeares Mädchen und Frauen* maintained that the Germans understood Shakespeare better than the English, and added: "Lessing war der erste, welcher in Deutschland seine Stimme für Shakespeare erhob.... Man könnte behaupten, die ganze Lessingsche Dramaturgie sei im Interesse Shakespeares geschrieben." The latter claim is also made by Furness in his preface to *Hamlet*. Gervinus declared in his *Commentaries on Shakespeare* that the man who first valued Shakespeare according to his full desert was indisputably Lessing, and in his *Litteraturgeschichte* (IV, 346) he tells us that without Lessing's recommendation of a translation of Shakespeare's dramas in the 17th *Litteraturbrief*, Wieland would probably not have begun his work. Ulrici was of the opinion that "Lessing was the first German to open up to his countrymen the understanding of the great poet whose mind was so closely related to his own" (*Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, II, 465). Friedrich Theodor Vischer, referring to Lessing's reverence for Shakespeare in the *Litteraturbriefe*, said: "So nahm Lessing den Hauptanteil an der Erweckung Shakespeares" (*Shakespeare-Vorträge*, I, 193).

In the various histories of German Literature this same estimate of Lessing prevails. Vilmar says: "Im Drama gilt ihm neben Shakespeare, den zwar Wieland 1762 übersetzte, auf den aber Lessing zuerst mit vollem Bewusstsein und vollem Erfolge hinwies, der Kanon des Aristoteles" (p. 365). In Robertson's recent *History of German Litera-*

ture, Lessing is the man "who opened the eyes of his countrymen to the greatness of Shakespeare" (p. 279). Even Hettner, who gives a rather conservative account of Lessing's position with regard to Shakespeare, concludes: "Erst durch Lessing's Dramaturgie ist Shakespeare in Deutschland heimisch geworden" (*Geschichte*, II, 482).

Lessing's biographers, with the possible exception of Erich Schmidt, are decidedly inclined to overestimate Shakespeare's influence upon the German poet. Danzel was the first who emphasized Shakespeare's influence upon Lessing's dramas and the reflex influence on German literature. His successor Guhrauer went still further and maintained that Lessing's knowledge and appreciation of Shakespeare accorded with that of the "Stürmer und Dränger" of the younger generation; that his admiration for the English dramatist, like theirs, was exclusive; and that whenever he referred to the English drama he had Shakespeare in mind. Similar views are expressed by Sime, Strodtman, Rolleston, Stahr, and Düntzer.

To determine now whether or not such an important place should be assigned to Lessing in introducing and expounding the great dramatist to his countrymen, investigations must be made in three directions. First, the direct references to Shakespeare in Lessing's writings; secondly, Shakespeare's influence on Lessing's dramas; and thirdly, a comparative estimate of Lessing's influence and efforts in behalf of Shakespeare.

I. *Direct References to Shakespeare.*

Lessing mentions Shakespeare for the first time in the preface to *Beiträge zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters*, dated October, 1749: "Shakespeare, Dryden, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Cibber, Congreve. . . sind Dichter, die man

fast bei uns nur dem Namen nach kennet, und gleichwohl verdienen sie unsere Hochachtung so wohl als die gepriesenen französischen Dichter" (Hempel, 11, 1, 6). Eight years later, Nov. 25, 1757, in a letter to his friend Nicolai, Lessing in a single sentence praises Mendelssohn's translation of Hamlet's monologue "To be or not to be": "Die Stelle aus dem Hamlet hat Herr Moses vortrefflich übersetzt" (20, 1, 139). In the translation of Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy* in the 4th number of the *Theatralische Bibliothek* (1758), Lessing inserts the explanation: "Die Regierung der Königin Elisabeth und Jacob's I., unter welcher Shakespeare, Jonson und andere grosse Genies lebten" (11, 1, 718). By "andere grosse Genies" Lessing must have meant Beaumont and Fletcher. In his *Wörterbuch* to Logau's *Sinngedichte* (12, 260), 1759, Lessing compares "das Mensch" with English "wench" and concludes from similarity of sound and meaning that they have the same origin. Quoting from Hanmer's edition,¹ he cites Othello's words referring to Desdemona: "O, excellent wench!" This is the first reference to Shakespeare which indicates that he had read the original. It was immediately followed by the famous 17th or *Niemand-Brief*, which opened with an attack on Gottsched, but was evidently directed against Voltaire and the French school (1759). In this letter Lessing recommends a translation of Shakespeare's masterpieces, but "mit einigen bescheidenen Veränderungen" and ranks *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet* next to the *Oedipus* of Sophocles in their power over our passions. In the 51st Letter Shakespeare's name is again mentioned, but not elsewhere in all the *Litteratur-briefe* written by Lessing.

¹The note quoted by Lessing: "The word 'wench' heretofore signified a young woman, often an amiable woman, so that some have thought it a corruption only from the word Venus," is taken from Hanmer's edition, Vol. VI, p. 488.

In *Laokoon* there is but one reference to Shakespeare (Chap. XXIII). To illustrate the statement: "If harmless ugliness may be ridiculous, injurious ugliness is always horrible," Lessing quotes Edmund's address to Nature in *King Lear*: "Thou, Nature, art my goddess" etc. (I, Sc. 2) and the Duke of Gloucester's opening monologue in *Richard III*: "But I, that am not shaped of sportive tricks," etc.

In the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* Shakespeare is more frequently referred to. In No. 5 Lessing translates a part of Hamlet's instructions to the players and recommends them as a golden rule for all actors. No. 7 informs us that the actor Quin played the role of Falstaff with the greatest perfection, and also that of the king in Hamlet. In Nos. 11 and 12 the ridiculous ghost of Ninus in Voltaire's *Semiramis* is compared with the ghost of Hamlet's father, and this conclusion is drawn: Voltaire's conception was the more philosophical, but Shakespeare's the more poetical. Refuting the claim that Voltaire's *Zaïre* was dictated by love, Lessing in No. 15 seizes the opportunity of praising Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* in a single sentence, and of showing what a sorry figure Voltaire's jealous Orosman plays beside the jealous Othello. From the 15th number we pass to the 69th before Shakespeare's name is again mentioned, and here it occurs in a quotation from the 12th Book of Wieland's *Agathon*, where a weak defence is made of Shakespeare's intermingling of the comic and tragic, by basing it upon the imitation of nature. In No. 37 Lessing's enthusiasm for Shakespeare is at its climax. Ironically charging Weisse with a poor memory for not having recollected Shakespeare's *Richard III* until after his own drama had been finished, Lessing devotes a page to showing that Shakespeare should be "studied and not plundered." Desdemona and Othello are mentioned in a quotation from Mendelssohn in No. 74, and in No. 80 Shake-

Shakespeare's plays are referred to as offering a curious proof of the needlessness of stage scenery. In No. 81 Shakespeare's name occurs in connection with that of Sophocles and Euripides, and finally in No. 93, in a quotation from Hurd, occurs a paragraph in praise of the well drawn characters in Shakespeare's comedies.

In the miscellaneous material collected in Hempel's edition under the title, *Aus Lessings Nachlass*, consisting of critical and etymological notes upon words, evidently intended for his proposed German Dictionary, Shakespeare is quoted seven times to illustrate the use of words. In regard to provincialisms he says: "So sind z. B. Krume und Kruste für den äussern harten und innern weichen Theil des Brodes gut englisch. Lear, Act. I. sc. 4: he that keeps nor crust nor crum." (Hempel, 12, 750). With "Vorboten" Lessing compares English "to bode" or "abode," and cites Hamlet: "This bodes some strange eruption to our state" (12, 756). He maintains that the word "alderlievest" in *Henry VI*: "With you, mine alderlievest sovereign," was derived by Shakespeare from the German "allerliebste" (12, 757). German "Tater" is the same as Shakespeare's "Bohemian-Tartar," "auschänden" the same as "to shend," "Mumme" the same as English "mum," all found in *Merry Wives of Windsor*. "Rausch" corresponds to English "rouse," *Othello* II, Sc. 3: "Fore heav'n, they have given me a rouse already." The quotations from *Hamlet* and *Henry VI*. were undoubtedly taken from Johnson's Dictionary, the others from some original edition of Shakespeare. In his remarks on Euripides (*Philol. Nachlass*, Hempel, 13, 289) Lessing says that he is always able to give a good reason for Shakespeare's faults, but not for Euripides' long descriptions in *Ion*, which interrupt the action.¹

¹ Fresenius (Sh. Jb. 39-245) asserts, without citing his authority, that Lessing is the author of Hamlet's monologue "To be or not to be" in Schröder's version of *Hamlet*.

Of these references only five are of any importance in judging Lessing's relations to Shakespeare; they are those found in the 17th *Litteraturbrief*, *Laokoon* (XXIII), and Nos. 11, 15, and 73 of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*. The first striking fact in regard to all of Lessing's utterances referring to Shakespeare is that they were made incidentally and for purposes of illustration, either to show the superficiality of the French stage or to support his particular theory of the drama. Shakespeare is not once discussed for his own sake. The purpose of the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* was to enthrone Aristotle, not Shakespeare, as Heine and Furness have declared, and to dethrone Voltaire, Corneille, and Racine. In so far as Shakespeare's dramas were in accord with Aristotle's theory expressed in his *Poetics*, Lessing used them to the extent of his knowledge.

In the wide range of discussions covering every phase of the drama, Lessing finds occasion to refer to only five of Shakespeare's tragedies: *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Richard III*. In his discussion of the historical drama in connection with Thomas Corneille's *Count of Essex* and Peter Corneille's *Rodogune* (*Dramaturgie* Nos. 22–25, 29–32), Shakespeare is not mentioned. For English comedies Lessing never had a high regard. His knowledge of Shakespeare's comedies must have been very limited, since they are not even referred to in all his writings on the drama; and were it not for the few quotations from the *Merry Wives of Windsor* in his *Wörterbuch* to Logau's *Sinngedichte*, we should not have known that he had any knowledge of them at all. The best English comedies, according to Lessing's idea, were those of a Congreve or Wicherley, and even these would not please on the German stage without being weeded of their episodes (*Dram.*, No. 12). Thus far we are in accord with Erich

Schmidt: "Überhaupt ist Lessings Stellung zu Shakespeare unmittelbar nur aus Gelegenheitsäusserungen, die sich auf einige hervorragende Trauerspiele, doch auf kein einziges Lustspiel beziehen, zu erschliessen" (I, 597).

Witkowski (*Euphorion*, II, 527) attributes Lessing's comparatively meager account of Shakespeare to a question of expediency. It is his opinion that Lessing intentionally refrained from advocating Shakespeare, because the German stage was not yet ready to receive the whole truth, and an unconditional recommendation of his dramas would have been more harmful than beneficial; it would have hastened on that "Storm and Stress" period which Lessing was trying to avert. This is a somewhat forced explanation and tends to hide the real facts. Lessing's theory of the drama was that of Aristotle: "I do not hesitate to acknowledge that I consider his 'Poetics' as infallible as the elements of Euclid . . . Tragedy cannot depart a step from the plumbline of Aristotle, without departing just so far from its own perfection" (*Dram.*, Nos. 101-4). It is evident that Shakespeare's dramas do not fulfil Aristotle's conditions; and that Lessing knew this, is proven by his discussion of Weisse's *Richard III*, and the 23rd chapter of *Laokoon*. The fact is, Lessing did not comprehend the true nature of Shakespeare's romantic drama, however well he may have understood the classic. Hettner is right when he says: "in das innerste Compositionsgeheimnis Shakespeare's ist Lessing doch niemals gedrungen. . . . Dieses innerste Wesen der Shakespeare'schen Charaktertragödie hat sich Lessing niemals zu klarer Erkenntniss gemacht" (II, 505).¹

In Lessing's vast correspondence with Mendelssohn and Nicolai upon the nature and purposes of the drama, Shake-

¹ Karl Sendel does not agree with Hettner. See *Schnorr's Archiv*, II, 72-93.

speare is never mentioned. Aristotle is so much his hobby that he exclaims: "Ich gehe in allem Ernst mit einem neuen Commentar über die Dichtkunst des Aristoteles, wenigstens desjenigen Theils, der die Tragödie angeht, schwanger."¹ When Eschenburg began his revision of Wieland's translation of Shakespeare (1773), Lessing gave aid by loaning him books from the Wolfenbüttel library and by making a few suggestions in regard to the sources of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Tempest*, and *Merchant of Venice*; never do we find a hint in regard to the interpretation of a drama.²

II. *Shakespeare's Influence on Lessing's Dramas.*

The dramas that come into consideration are: *Henzi* (1753), *Das Befreite Rom* (1756 or 1757), *Philotas* (1759), *Alcibiades* (1760), *Minna von Barnhelm* (1766), and *Emilia Galotti* (1772). Danzel and Boxberger attribute the *Henzi* fragment to Borck's translation of *Julius Caesar* (1741). Erich Schmidt takes exception to this, as well as Hettner and Josef Caro (*Euphorion*, VI, 473), who have shown that the unmistakable source is Otway's *Venice Preserved*. Referring to the unities of time and place, which are so slavishly preserved in *Henzi*, Lessing says: "Gewisse grosse Geister würden diese kleine Regeln ihrer Aufmerksamkeit nicht würdig geschätzt haben." These words have always been construed as referring principally to Shakespeare. It is very doubtful whether Lessing had him in mind at this time (1753). The alteration of the parenthetical words "Shakespeare, Otway u. s. w." after the word "Geister" in Schmidt's first edition of Lessing's life (I, 208) to "Eng-

¹ Letter to Mendelssohn Nov. 5, 1768. (Hemp. 20, 1, 296).

² See correspondence between Lessing and Eschenburg.—(Hemp., 20-II.).

lands" in the second edition (I, 215) may indicate that the author changed his view on this point. Danzel also sees Shakespeare's influence in *Das Befreite Rom*, erroneously supposing it to have been sketched in 1749. He says: "Die Pöbelscenen und die Possen des Brutus hatte Lessing wenigstens nicht den Franzosen abgelernt; auch finden sich hier Reden des Collatinus und Brutus ans Volk, die an die des Brutus und Antonius bei Shakespeare erinnern" (I, 166); and E. Schmidt declares: "Dieser Pöbel lacht in der Shakespearisirenden Tragödie, wenn Brutus den Dolch aufhebt" (I, 342). Lessing's sketch, consisting only of about two dozen sentences, is too incomplete for comparison with Shakespeare's *Julius Cæsar*, and the mob-scene, which the drama was to contain, may not have been suggested by Shakespeare at all. The same drama upon which Lessing based his *Henzi*, viz., Otway's *Venice Preserved*, may also have given him the idea of bringing mobs and crowds on the stage. In Act V, Sc. 3 of Otway's drama, a great rabble is present when Pierre is to be executed. Farquhar's *The Constant Couple* (1700), upon which Lessing drew for his *Minna von Barnhelm*, contains a mob, and the custom of bringing mobs and crowds and people of all rank on the stage was not uncommon with other writers than Shakespeare; e. g., Jonson's *Volpone; or the Fox* (1605) and *Bartholomew Fair* (1614), Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* (1680), Southern's *Oroonoko* (1696), Hughe's *Siege of Damascus* (1720), Whitehead's *Roman Father* (1750), Thomson's *Tuncred and Sigismunda* (1744).

In *Philotas*, Lessing's shortest drama, three scenes are filled with the longest monologues that he ever wrote, and these E. Schmidt attributes partly to Shakespeare, partly to the Greek dramatists (I, 351). When Lessing composed *Philotas* (1759), he was undoubtedly acquainted with *Hamlet* and *Othello*, and probably with *King Lear*. In one

monologue the hero speaks of dying, and this suggests to E. Schmidt a comparison with Hamlet's *To be or not to be*. Now, of all English writers none produced a profounder impression upon Lessing from 1750 to 1760 than Thomson. In 1754 Lessing published a brief biography of him; in 1756 he wrote the preface to the German translation of his tragedies, where he considers him "einen von den grössten Geistern"; he himself translated parts of Thomson's *Agamemnon* and *Tancred and Sigismunda*; and it is Thomson's tragedies that are especially noted for their long speeches and monologues, a fault which Lessing especially refers to in his biography of the poet. It is more than probable, therefore, that the long soliloquies in *Philotas* are due to Thomson's influence.

In regard to *Alcibiades*, Josef Caro (*Euph.*, 6, 481) has pointed out Hettner's error in supposing it to have been influenced by *Coriolanus*.

In *Minna von Barnhelm*, Otto Ludwig saw a direct influence of Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*. Minna and Franziska are Portia and Nerissa, the ring episode in the English drama suggested the one in Lessing's, etc. Here again E. Schmidt and Josef Caro may be accepted as authority that whatever English influence, including the ring episode, is discernible in Lessing's play, is due to Farquhar's *Constant Couple: or a Trip to the Jubilee* and *Sir Harry Wildair*.

The only drama which may have been directly influenced by Shakespeare is *Emilia Galotti*. It was after seeing this drama presented on the stage that Lessing's friend Ebert exclaimed: "O Shakespeare-Lessing"! (Hempel, 20, II, 576). Otto Ludwig in his enthusiasm for the English dramatist turns to *Emilia Galotti* and sees "viel Shakespearesches" in it: "z. B. die meisterhafte Emanzipation vom Katechismus im Dialoge, das Freimachen der Figu-

ren, das Beginnen vom Anfange bis zum wirklichen Ende. . . . Die innere Technik ist Shakespearesch, die äussere französisch, etc." (*Shakespeare-Studien*, 338). It is very easy and natural for one absorbed in Shakespeare's dramas to find resemblances and coincidences in other dramas, and it is often difficult, but important, to distinguish between Shakespeare's influence and mere accidental coincidences. Owing to the breadth and depth, variety and universality of Shakespeare's dramas it would be difficult, indeed, for any writer who deserves the name of poet, but never heard of Shakespeare, to compose a play and not give someone the opportunity of writing a thesis on "The Influence of Shakespeare." Perhaps E. Schmidt is right when he says that Lessing, at the time he wrote *Emilia Galotti*, stood much nearer to rare *Ben Jonson* than to the *Will of all Wills* (II, 48). Be this as it may, the fact remains that in *Emilia Galotti* Lessing approaches the character drama of Shakespeare, whereas in his other dramas he emphasizes the plot or story in accordance with Aristotle's theory. Whether this may be attributed directly to Shakespeare's influence, or to the universality of the two poets, will very probably have to remain a matter of opinion.

III. — *Comparative Estimate of Lessing's Efforts in Behalf of Shakespeare.*¹

Comparing Lessing's efforts in behalf of Shakespeare with those of his contemporaries, we find that he is more a follower than a leader. When his 17th *Litteratur-brief* appeared, *Julius Cæsar* (1741), *Romeo and Juliet* (1758), and parts of *Richard III* (1756) had been translated into German. Gottsched had reviewed Borek's

¹ The writer has in preparation a thesis on "Wieland und Eschenburg als Shakespeare-Übersetzer," where this subject will be further discussed.

translation of *Julius Cæsar* in the 27th number of his journal, *Beyträge zur critischen Historie* (1741); in the next number appeared J. E. Schlegel's comparison of Shakespeare and Andreas Gryphius;¹ the English weeklies, which were popular in Germany at this time in translations, had frequently called attention to Shakespeare: the *Spectator* alone refers to him in at least twenty-one numbers (Nos. 22, 29, 39, 40, 42, 44, 45, 61, 116, 141, 160, 206, 235, 279, 285, 396-7, 419, 474, 541, 592); in the 29th number of his journal (1742), Gottsched reviews the 592d number of the *Spectator*, discussing the irregularities of *Julius Cæsar*; in the third edition of his *Critische Dichtkunst* (1742), Shakespeare is again briefly discussed; in the first number of *Beyträge zur Historie und Aufnahme des Theaters* (1750), Lessing's friend Mylius published *Voltaire's Gedanken über die Trauer und Lustspiele der Engländer*, translated from his *Lettres sur les Anglais*," where Shakespeare is discussed (Lettre XVIII). The fourth number of a Leipzig journal, *Neue Erweiterungen der Erkenntniss und des Vergnügens* (1753), published a long article on "Merkwürdige Lebensbeschreibungen des Herrn William Shakespeares." In 1754 Nicolai in his *Briefe über die itzigen Zustände der schönen Wissenschaften* suggested the secret of Shakespeare's power: "Shakespeare, ein Mann ohne Kenntniss der Regeln, ohne Gelehrsamkeit, ohne Ordnung, hat der Mannigfaltigkeit und der Stärke seiner Charaktere, den grössten Theil des Ruhmes zu danken, den ihm seine und alle andere Nationem, noch bis diese Stunde geben." Antedating Lessing's recommendation of Shakespeare's Masterpieces (17th *Litteraturbrief*) by a year, Nicolai in his *Bibliothek der schönen Wissenschaften* (VI, Stück,

¹ Eugen Reichel assigns this article to Gottsched in his recent work, *Ein Gottsched-Denkmal*, p. 33.

60-74) 1758, in his review of a three volume work, *Neue Probestücke der Englischen Schaubühne*, containing translations of English dramas, one of which is Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, directs translators to Shakespeare in the following words: "Wir haben schon mehr als einmal gewünscht, dass sich ein guter Übersetzer an die englische Schaubühne wagen, und seine Landsleute hauptsächlich mit den vortrefflichen alten Stücken des Shakespeare, Beaumont und Fletcher, Otway und andern bekannt machen möchte. Es würde vielleicht für die deutsche Schaubühne weit vorteilhafter gewesen seyn, wenn sie jenen nachgeahmt hätte, als dass sie sich die französische Galanterie hinreissen lassen, und mit einer Menge höchst elender, obgleich höchstregelmässiger Stücken bereichert hat. . . . Wir empfehlen hauptsächlich dem Übersetzer die Shakespearischen Stücke; sie sind die schönsten, aber auch die schwersten, aber um desto eher zu übersetzen, wenn man nützlich seyn will." In 1756-7, "als noch Shakespeare's Welt für Lessing ein geschlossenes Buch war" (E. Schmidt, I, 297), Mendelssohn is already engaged in studying Shakespeare and translating monologues from *Hamlet* and still the idea is current that Lessing introduced him as well as Nicolai to the great dramatist. What little Lessing knew of Shakespeare previous to 1758 he had obtained at second hand through Voltaire's writings, La Place's French translation, and the few articles on Shakespeare that had appeared in German periodicals. Undoubtedly it was Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, together with the influence of his friends, Nicolai and Mendelssohn, that directed Lessing at this time to read a few dramas of Shakespeare in the original and prompted him to those utterances on Shakespeare in the 17th *Litteraturbrief*. Nor was it this 17th "Letter" that impelled Wieland to begin his translation, which must

needs be mentioned with a smile if one wishes to conform to the fashion of the critics. Wieland had been a student and admirer of Shakespeare at least since 1754, and when he planned his translation, the relations between the two poets were such as to cause Wieland to have little regard for Lessing's advice. Referring to Mendelssohn's severe criticism of his *Clementina von Porretta* (1760) in the *Litteraturbriefe*, he writes to Zimmerman: "Der Misachtung meiner 'Clementina' von Lessing und Compagnie achte ich nicht mehr als des Summens der Sommermücken oder des Quäckens der Laubfrösche." In the 15th number of the *Dramaturgie*, Lessing atones for the injustice he had done Wieland by praising and recommending his translation of Shakespeare.

When Lessing's *Dramaturgie* appeared (1767), Shakespeare had secured a foothold in Germany. Wieland's translation of twenty-two dramas had been published, of which Goethe after being introduced to the English poet in Leipsic (1766) through Dodd's *Beauties*, remarks: "Sie ward verschlungen, Freunden und Bekannten mitgetheilt und empfohlen" (*Dichtung u. Wahrheit*, III, 11th Book). In 1764 Herder in Königsberg learned English by reading *Hamlet* with his teacher Hamann, and in 1767 in Riga we find him translating songs and soliloquies from Shakespeare. Gerstenberg had already sent his fiery "Letters" from the north, four of which he devoted to Shakespeare; and the "Storm and Stress" period, inaugurated by Young's *Essay on Original Composition* (1759) and Johnson's preface to his edition of Shakespeare's works, had established the Shakespeare cult.

Finally, we may ask with Julian Schmidt (II, 23): Why did not Lessing, while he was director of the "National Theater" at Hamburg, give his enthusiasm for Shakespeare a practical turn? With all his aversion to the

plays of Voltaire, Corneille, and Racine, there were twenty French plays given to every seven German and one English. The great theatre at Hamburg was outstripped in this respect by the amateur theatre at Biberach under Wieland's direction, which in 1761 had presented *The Tempest*; and before the first Shakespearean drama was played in Hamburg by F. L. Schröder in 1776, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *As You Like It* had each been presented from three to four times in Wieland's native city. Lessing found his countrymen slavishly imitating the French drama; he directed them to Shakespeare, but he himself followed mainly the footsteps of Diderot.

James Russell Lowell believed that the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* did not exert a great influence on German literature. This undoubtedly is true so far as Shakespeare is concerned. Directly, then, Lessing did little in favor of him, but there is no doubt that indirectly his commanding eminence as a critic must have lent prestige to the new spirit which was now awakening in German literature, and the vigor of his attacks on Voltaire and the French school removed many prejudices and difficulties and paved the way for a more favorable reception of the great dramatist.

F. W. MEISNEST.